



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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Back to basics: Weapons safety

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Soldiers depend on their weapons, and when one fails, it could mean the difference between life and death. But by taking precautions like thorough preventive maintenance checks and services and proper storage, they greatly reduce the likelihood of malfunction and possibly an accident.

"Soldiers should have a full understanding of the importance of maintaining their weapons," said Lt. Col. James Smith, director, U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center Ground Directorate. "A weapon can be a lifeline when there's no other option. Who wants a weapon to malfunction when they need it most?"

Exposed to austere conditions around the world, Soldiers often endure challenges as they complete their missions. Abrasive sand and extreme temperatures can wreak havoc on their weapons systems.

"Most Soldiers serving today would probably agree that the most important piece of equipment they've been issued is their weapon," said Tracey Russell, a safety and occupational health specialist at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center. "As such, taking the time to clean their weapons and perform proper PMCS consistently can make all the difference in the world. If a malfunction does occur, follow the troubleshooting procedures in the appropriate technical manual and report deficiencies to the unit armorer for repairs."

In addition to proper weapons care, Soldiers should always remember the basics of weapons handling. Proper clearing procedures are paramount; some of the most common reasons that negligent discharges occur are failure to follow proper clearing procedures and a lack of muzzle awareness.

Two recent accidents show that even a moment of complacency can be devastating. One Soldier lost a toe when he fired a round through his boot after failing to clear his shotgun after returning from a patrol mission. Another Soldier died while checking the chamber of another Soldier's weapon. The Soldier holding the weapon improperly let the slide go forward and pulled the trigger as the other Soldier conducted the inspection.

"Being familiar with a weapon is not good enough for safe handling," Smith said. "All Soldiers must be trained to a professional level with their assigned weapon and avoid complacency while handling them."

"There's a simple acronym we use that can help Soldiers remember the basics of weapons safety," Russell said. "THINK. Treat every weapon as if it's loaded, handle every weapon with care, identify the target before you fire, never point the muzzle at anything you don't intend to shoot, and keep the weapon on safe and your finger off the trigger until you intend to fire."

For more information on safe weapons handling, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.